



File Code: 1950

Date: December 16, 2016

Dear Friends and Neighbors of the Bridger-Teton National Forest:

The Final Supplemental Environmental Impact Statement (FSEIS) has been completed for the proposal for the Forest Service to consider to authorize the Bureau of Land Management (BLM) to offer oil and gas leases on 39,490 acres on the eastern slope of the Wyoming Range within the boundary of the Bridger-Teton National Forest in Sublette County, Wyoming. The FSEIS is available on the Bridger-Teton National Forest webpage, <http://www.fs.usda.gov/project/?project=48737>. The FSEIS is in two volumes; there is also a summary document. The Notice of Availability (NOA) of this FSEIS was published in the Federal Register on Dec. 16, 2016.

Because of the project's long history and the significant level of public interest and concern for the proposal as described below, the Under Secretary of Agriculture for Natural Resources and Environment has elected to retain his authority to sign the Record of Decision (ROD) for this project. Available at the above webpage is the draft ROD; it is anticipated that this is the decision that will be signed by the Under Secretary 30 days after publication of the NOA for the FSEIS. This draft decision is consistent with the broad support expressed for the preferred alternative. The Under Secretary of Agriculture's decision is not subject to the Forest Service Predecisional Administrative Review Process (36 CFR 218.13).

Four alternatives are analyzed in the FSEIS: alternative 1, no leasing; and three leasing alternatives (2, 3, and 4). In alternatives 2, 3, and 4, the Forest Service would authorize the BLM, or consent to them offering specific parcels for competitive lease with varying levels of resource protection in the form of stipulations. The Draft SEIS was released for public comment in April 2016, at which time the preferred alternative was the no leasing alternative. No leasing remains the preferred alternative in the FSEIS.

This project has had a long and controversial history. The 1990 Bridger-Teton National Forest Land and Resource Management Plan allowed for certain lands, including these, to be administratively available for oil and gas leasing. Since then, there have been multiple attempts to offer parcels of lands for lease. This has resulted in leases being offered, decisions being appealed, and leases being suspended or cancelled upon request. In 2005, the Forest Service authorized the BLM to offer leasing of 35 parcels on 44,720 acres (the current 39,490 being a subset of that). However, appeals filed with the BLM Interior Board of Land Appeals prompted the Forest Service to reinstate the environmental analysis. In 2011, the Forest Service prepared an FSEIS and issued a decision; however, after administrative appeals were filed, that decision was withdrawn to allow further analysis. The current FSEIS is the result of that further analysis.

Over this period of time, public interest in this project has grown, as has the complexity of the issues around oil and gas leasing in the Wyoming Range. More than 62,000 comments were submitted on the April 2016 Draft Supplemental Environmental Impact Statement. These came from all over the nation, from State and local governments, organizations, and members of the local community. Public comments spoke with a clear voice regarding the collective effect of this project on "sense of place" in the Wyoming Range. The Bridger-Teton National Forest is recognized nationally for its wild lands, recreation opportunities, wildlife, biodiversity, and watershed values. The Bridger-Teton contributes significantly to the Yellowstone region's recreation and tourism. Large expanses of backcountry such as that found in the Wyoming Range and surrounding areas are one of the most valuable and desirable features for such



popular activities as big game hunting, horseback riding, and hiking into remote areas. The backcountry nature of the area contributes strongly to the sense of place in the Wyoming Range.

Comments from the citizens of Wyoming and local communities, even those making their living directly or indirectly from the energy sector, provided overwhelming and significant rationale and support for alternative 1. Many stated that the cumulative negative effects on the historical culture, the recreational benefits, the lifestyle that draws people to live here, and the associated economic benefit stemming from these values, outweigh the economic benefit that would result from the oil and gas development associated with this project. A large portion of the local community obtain a portion of their livelihood from areas located within the Wyoming Range through ranching, hunting, wood gathering, and guiding.

Please address any questions on this project to Nora Rasure, Regional Forester, Intermountain Region, at (801) 625-5605. I appreciate your interest and participation in this analysis process.

Sincerely,

PATRICIA M O'CONNOR
Forest Supervisor